

Mothers' Union Diocese of Peterborough Diocesan Festival

Saturday 26th March 2022 at Peterborough Cathedral

On a lovely bright, sunny day, approximately 180 members of the Mothers' Union gathered at our mother church of Peterborough Cathedral to celebrate our diocesan festival. This event should have happened in 2021, as it occurs every three years tying in with the triennium perms of office, but like so many other things, it was delayed by the Covid-'9 pandemic. All gathered for the service delighted to be there face-to-face for this celebration service. The banners of the Mothers' Union branches followed the celebrant, the Honorary Assistant Bishop, the Right Reverend Andrew Proud down the main aisle at the start of the service. The diocesan banner should have been carried by Jill Cannings, the past-President of the Mothers' Union, but unfortunately, she had been struck down with Covid the weekend before, so her son James ably stepped into the breach and processed the banner to the altar.



The service followed with the Reverend Deborah Marsh, the chaplain to the Mothers' Union, stepping in and preaching Jill's sermon on her behalf.

An excerpt from Jill's sermon follows:-

"Well as you know I am a **has been** diocesan President, a **past** President but I am speaking today as this festival should have happened last September at the end of my Triennial. It was a privilege to serve as MU diocesan president for 2019-21 and I am blessed to have handed over to the capable hands of Helen and her team, who will be commissioned today.

Today I want to focus on one of my passions which is that lay and ordained people should work together to build God's Kingdom. Mary Sumner the founder of MU had a passion to touch lives for Christ. We all have a part to play in sharing our faith and building God's Kingdom as we have heard in both readings today.

I am keen that MU should support our clergy in prayer and action. Across the Diocese MU members undertake all support roles in our churches. We are delighted to have Bishop Andrew presiding today. He is an MU member and was a previous central chaplain for 6 years. Our MU chaplain Revd Deborah Marsh was very much encouraged and influenced on her faith journey by MU. Some of our members are ordained or have lay ministries. We support youth ministries, many are involved in church music, MU members are readers, intercessors, sacristans, vergers, PCC members, church wardens, parish administrators, brass cleaners, people who faithfully open and close our churches. Apologies for those roles I have omitted. We are of course renowned for wonderful hospitality; providing teas and coffees and very good cakes do stay and enjoy some after the service. **But** sadly we are not very good at saying what we do.

In fact we are much more than the above, as we have a worldwide ministry and mission.

During the last 145 years MU has spread across the world bringing faith and joy and hope to individuals and whole communities. I have seen this first hand in Tanzania, South Africa and Antigua. In the context of a worldwide pandemic and the devastating impact of war on family life there has never been a greater need for MU. Our annual subscription of just £23 per year, which is just the price of a meal out, glass of wine and a coffee, members can support a worldwide mission and ministry.

But we are more than all of the above. Even during the last 2 years of intermittent lockdowns we have been flexible and inventive and kept our ministry going

- Members supporting each other and their clergy.
- Crafting in support of COVID needs, and gifts of love in the community.
- Flexible AFIA support to families, which has resulted in wonderful feedback.
- Also flexible support to lunch club families
- We continue to support the Daylight Centre started by MU
- We will still manage to send Christmas cards and indeed chocolates to prisoners.
- Our MU policies highlight all forms of family abuse and oppression

Last year despite all the challenges we achieved 2 new initiatives. We created and personally delivered useful packs of information and resources to all clergy and these have been followed up with an e mail giving them easy links to ask for more information or prayer or someone to preach. We also joined with many across the world in Global day with a reflective service here in the cathedral highlighting the appalling fact that 1 in 3 women suffer abuse during their lives. So I may be a **has been, a past President** but I remain as passionate about Mothers' Union, about touching lives for Christ and about building God's Kingdom. Like our clergy and our churches we have held firm in our trust in God. We have been resilient and flexible. We are the body of Christ and each has a part to play prayerfully and where possible actively. God will have plans for us as we move forward. As we say in the words of the Mothers' Union prayer "Empowered by your Spirit, may we be united in prayer and worship, and in love and service reach out as your hands across the world. Amen."



Following the Communion, the new Diocesan President, Helen Lynett was commissioned to her new role, and Helen then introduced the Trustees and Officers of the Diocese who were also commissioned by the Bishop. During the final hymn, the banners departed following the Diocesan Banner now held by Helen, having been handed over by James Cannings.



The baton has been passed on for another three years. We look forward to a time of growth and encouragement in furthering God's kingdom in our towns and villages, as members fulfil practical needs and help strengthen Christian family life.

The inspiring service was then followed in the time-honoured tradition of tea and cake wonderfully produced and served by members of Rutland Deanery.

Jean Rose
Diocesan Secretary